

NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
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CONLEY/TOKYO

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TOKYO'S EMBATTLED INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

ANNCR:

THE RECENT ATTACK ON THE CONTROL TOWER OF THE NEW TOKYO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT AT NARITA BY JAPANESE RADICALS HAS ADDED ANOTHER VIOLENT CHAPTER TO ITS TROUBLE-PLAGUED HISTORY.

VOA'S EDWARD CONLEY SENDS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT FROM TOKYO.

VOICE:

IT WAS IN 1966 THAT THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT DECIDED ITS INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT AT HANEDA NEAR TOKYO WOULD SOON BE OUTDATED AND UNABLE TO HANDLE THE INCREASING FLOW OF AIR TRAFFIC IN AND OUT OF JAPAN. THE SOLUTION SEEMED SIMPLE ENOUGH. A ONE THOUSAND HECTARE SITE LOCATED AT NARITA, AN INLAND AGRICULTURAL AREA SOME SIXTY-SIX KILOMETERS NORTHEAST OF TOKYO, WAS SELECTED AND ANNOUNCED AS THE LOCATION FOR A NEW MODERN INTERNATIONAL AIR TERMINAL.

THAT WAS TWELVE YEARS AGO, AND TO DATE NOT ONE PAYING PASSENGER HAS LANDED OR TAKEN OFF FROM NARITA. THE REASONS: DEFIANT OPPOSITION BY FARMERS AT THE PROPOSED SITE WHEN ASKED TO SELL THEIR LAND TO THE GOVERNMENT, ENVIRONMENTAL AND OTHER COMPLAINTS BY OFFICIALS AND RESIDENTS OF NEARBY TOWNS AND PREFECTURES, AND A NEW CAUSE BY WHICH JAPAN'S RADICAL STUDENTS COULD CARRY ON THEIR OVERALL CAMPAIGN AGAINST JAPANESE GOVERNMENT POLICIES. WHAT HAS ENSUED SINCE THAT INITIAL DECISION HAS BEEN A LONG SERIES OF VIOLENT CLASHES BETWEEN DEMONSTRATORS AND RIOT POLICE, CLASHES WHICH HAVE CLAIMED FIVE LIVES, AT LEAST EIGHT THOUSAND INJURIES AND ABOUT TWO THOUSAND ARRESTS.

THE ULTRA MODERN AIRPORT WAS COMPLETED IN 1973, BUILT HAS SAT IDLE SINCE THEN WITH PROBLEMS LOOMING LARGER AND LARGER AND THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT MORE AND MORE INSISTENT ON ITS OPENING. BECAUSE LAND CANNOT BE PURCHASED TO BUILT FUEL PIPE LINES TO NARITA, IT WAS DECIDED TO SENT THE FUEL BY TRAIN. EARLIER THIS YEAR, BECAUSE OF SECURITY REASONS, THE FIRST TRAIN LOAD OF JET FUEL TO THE AIRPORT WAS GUARDED BY SEVEN THOUSAND POLICEMEN. BECAUSE LAND CANNOT BE PURCHASED TO BUILD A SPEEDY BULLET TRAIN SUCH AS OPERATE ELSEWHERE IN JAPAN ACCESS TO THE REMOTE AIRPORT, A COMPLEX NETWORK OF SUBWAY, TRAIN AND BUS CONNECTIONS HAS BEEN DEvised -- A NETWORK THAT ASSURES AT LEAST A TWO-HOUR TRIP TO THE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT FROM CENTRAL TOKYO.

WHEN DEMONSTRATORS ANNOUNCED A LAST-DITCH EFFORT TO STOP THE PLANNED MARCH TWENTIETH OPENING OF THE AIRFIELD, SOME FOURTEEN THOUSAND RIOT POLICE WERE STATIONED AT NARITA. YET LAST SUNDAY SIX RADICAL DEMONSTRATORS SLIPPED BY THAT CORDON AND RUINED SENSITIVE AND NECESSARY EQUIPMENT IN THE AIR FIELD'S CONTROL TOWER ONCE AGAIN THREATENING THE OPENING OF NARITA.

NARITA IS FAST BECOMING THE AIRPORT THAT NO ONE REALLY WANTS. BUT THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT, WITH ITS REPUTATION ON THE LINE AND FACED WITH SERIOUS ECONOMIC PROBLEMS, TOO, IS IN THE AWKWARD POSITION OF SUPPORTING THE OPENING OF WHAT HAS BECOME OVER THE YEARS A MORE THAN TWO THOUSAND MILLION DOLLAR FACILITY. AND IF AND WHEN NARITA DOES OPEN TO COMMERCIAL AIR TRAFFIC HUGE AMOUNTS OF MONEY WILL CONTINUE TO BE REQUIRED FOR NECESSARY SECURITY MEASURES.

THE IRONY OF THE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT NARITA SITUATION IS THAT PERHAPS IT DIDN'T HAVE TO HAPPEN IN THE FIRST PLACE.

TWELVE YEARS AGO, WHEN PLANNERS CALLED FOR A NEW AIR FACILITY, THEY UNDERESTIMATED THE VAST INCREASE IN USAGE OF JUMBO JETLINERS WHICH HANDLE MORE PASSENGERS WITH FEWER PLANES. TODAY HANEDA AIRPORT, THOUGH CROWDED AT TIMES, IS HANDLING THOSE JUMBO PLANES AND INCREASED PASSENGER LOADS WITH LITTLE DIFFICULTY.

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